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"DER BESTRAFTE BRUDERMORD" AND ITS RELATION TO SHAKESPEARE'S "HAMLET."¹

It is well known that a German dramatization (D) of the Hamlet story has been preserved, which H. A. O. Reichard first published in the form of an abstract in 1779 and two years later in full. It was based on a MS of the year 1710 which is now lost and which was entitled *Tragoedia Der bestrafte Brudermord oder Prinz Hamlet aus Dännemark*. In the main outlines of the action as well as in many details it agrees with Shakespeare. Most of the characteristics which D has in common with Shakespeare are found in the quarto edition of *Hamlet* of the year 1604 (B), containing practically the current text, and also in the quarto edition of 1603 (A), based, as is well known, on a very careless copy that an unscrupulous bookseller had ordered someone to prepare during a performance. D has, however, also some characteristics found only in B and others which appear only in A.

There is no doubt whatsoever, nor has anyone ever denied, that D is one of those dramas which during the florescence of the English theater were taken from England to Germany by traveling companies of actors, and there subjected to all sorts of changes, chiefly distortions. But there is still a great divergence of opinion as to the nature of the English drama upon which the German is based.

Some assert that D is based on the lost pre-Shakespearean tragedy of *Hamlet*, now usually ascribed to Thomas Kyd (Z), although perhaps many special features of Shakespeare's tragedy may have been introduced into the German adaptation of the older drama. This view I shall not discuss in detail in the following paragraphs, as its erroneousness must be at once evident to anyone competent to judge. Although those parts of D which diverge from Shakespeare can be proved to be additions such as the

¹ In this article I confirm and defend my views on *Der bestrafte Brudermord* which I discussed in detail in *Berichte der philol.-histor. Classe der Königl. Sächs. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, 1887, pp. 1 f., and in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten, Deutsche National-literatur*, Vol. XXIII (1889).

traveling players in Germany inserted in other stock pieces coming from England, those scholars who see traces of the pre-Shakespearean *Hamlet* in D claim that they can show in the parts of D not agreeing with Shakespeare traces of Kyd's taste. The falsity of their arguments I have exposed elsewhere;¹ here I wish to point out only that the prologue of the Furies upon which the adherents of this view lay especial emphasis does not belong originally to D, but was added later by the actors in Germany, as is evident from several passages which are absolutely out of accord with the play itself.²

Still more erroneous of course is the assumption of the adherents of this view that Z is the source of the parts of D which agree with Shakespeare, thus making of Shakespeare a plagiarist and of the author of Z one of the greatest poets of all time. Schick, for example, concludes unhesitatingly from D that the traditional legend had been so altered in Z that Hamlet does not reach his goal by means of clever simulation, but meets a tragic end. I think there can be no doubt that when Shakespeare, during his gloomy period, created a new *Hamlet* tragedy, he treated the traditional story in the same manner as he did the legend of *King Lear* about that very time. In both instances he changed the happy ending to a tragic one, and at the same time modified the traditional character of the main persons in such a way that the tragic outcome seems like an inherent necessity.

I may limit myself, then, to a discussion of the views of those who derive D from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

A typical peculiarity of A, found again in the *dramatis personae* of D, namely that Polonius is called Corambus (in A Corambis), caused formerly several superficial observers to assume that D is based on A. Some there were, however, and Dyce among them, who noticed certain points of agreement between D

¹Cf. *Berichte*, pp. 23 f., and *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, pp. 131 f. I may add here that *kronstüchtig* (D, I, 5) is a catch-word used in Dutch tragedies and thence transplanted into Germany about the middle of the seventeenth century.

²If there is in D, as some suppose, an allusion to Drake's return from his ill-starred expedition to Portugal—i. e., to an event that was ostensibly contemporary with the appearance of Z—I must add to what I have already said that Drake returned in June, 1589, and that on August 23 GREENE's *Menaphon* was entered in the Stationers' Register. In NASH's preface to this work is found the oldest known allusion to Z. The event, the allusion in Z, and Nash's reference must have followed one another with remarkable rapidity.

and B. Dyce surmised therefore that the author of the German version used the current text (B) as well as A. Genée expressed a similar view, and the opinion that D is based on A, but includes also some of the peculiarities of B, was shared, so far as I know, by most competent judges until 1887, when I expressed the opinion that D is based on a lost version of Shakespeare's text (Y), which was used in the performances of the Shakespeare troupe and which had the peculiarities of both A and B. Furthermore, I stated that Y was closely related to B which reproduces practically the authentic Shakespeare text, but that Y in view of its stage production had contained some modifications; and that these were also transferred to A, which is based on a copy made in the theater. We know that such copies were prepared at that time in the theaters by the assistants of unscrupulous booksellers. Of course, there can be no doubt that such an assistant reproduced in a very careless way what he heard on the stage, very often abridging and distorting it. But in those instances in which A agrees with D and not B we may suppose, according to my view, that the divergence from B is to be explained not on the basis of arbitrariness or carelessness, but that it goes back to Y, or, in other words, that it is a faithful reproduction of what was heard upon the stage. On this account D is of importance in the history of the text of the Shakespearean tragedy; in some points of D likewise which agree neither with A nor B we may suppose that the old English stage-tradition has been retained by D.

A year after my publication of this view Tanger objected to it.¹ Tanger holds that D is based essentially on A. He thinks that the traits in D which point back to B are not so numerous by far as my compilation would make them appear; and that, as a matter of fact, there are only “exceedingly few traits which remind one of B.” Moreover, these characteristics are not to be traced back to their source, he says, but are rather subsequent additions to the German adaptation, due to the stage tradition which was ever and again enlivened by English players.

In the first place, Tanger overlooks this fact: the supposition that the English companies in Germany used A as a basis of their

¹ In the *Jahrbuch der deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft*, Vol. XXIII (1888), pp. 224 f.

performances is at the outset very improbable. This edition contains, to be sure, the essential features of the action as does B, but it is improbable that the actors, if they did use a printed edition, would have selected this bad text, which was mutilated beyond recognition in many places, and of which only one single edition was extant, when numerous editions of the better text could be had. On the other hand, the supposition that D is based on a MS written in the theater must seem very plausible from the outset to anyone familiar with the history of the German stage during the period we are discussing. Such MSS must be assumed without any doubt in the case of a large number of stock-pieces played by the English companies. The *Tragoedia von Barrabas, Juden in Malta*, for example, was performed in Dresden in 1626, although the original, Marlowe's *Rich Jew*, was not published before 1633. Machin's *Dumb Knight* was entered on the Stationers' Register in 1608, but Ayrer, who died in 1605, had rendered it into German. Other English dramas performed in Germany, such as Peele's *Mahomet* and those dramas on which *Tugend und Liebesstreit*, *Sidea*, *Julius und Hippolyte* are based, were not printed at all.

Peculiar also is the manner in which Tanger attempts to substantiate his view that the points of agreement with B can be explained through later interpolations of a text based on A. First of all he tries to show that twenty of the many points of agreement between D and B which I enumerated¹ are not conclusive. He can do this somewhat easily, for I said that I would present not only those points of agreement which show an indisputable connection, but also those that may possibly be due to mere chance. After eliminating all the cases which in his opinion belong to the latter class, Tanger himself admits three or rather four cases in which the agreement cannot possibly be attributed to chance.

3. The speech of the king at his first entrance begins as follows in D, I, 7:

Obschon unseres Herrn Bruders Tod noch in frischem Gedächtniss bey jedermann ist und uns gebietet alle Solennitäten einzustellen, werden wir doch anjetzo genöthiget, unsere schwarze Trauerkleider in Carmosin,

¹In the following paragraphs I have numbered these coincidences exactly as in the *Berichte*, pp. 15 f.

Purpur und Scharlach zu verändern, weil nunmehr meines seeligen Herrn Bruders hinterbliebene Wittwe unsere liebste Gemahlin worden; darum erzeige sich ein jeder freudig und mache sich unser Lust theilhaftig.

These words are taken, of course, from the speech of King Claudius, B, I, 2, 1 f.: “Though yet of Hamlet our dear brothers death Taken to wife”—words which are not found in A.

11. In D, III, 9, mad Ophelia cries: “Siehe da, mein Kütschchen, mein Kütschchen;” in B, IV, 5, 70: “Come my coach”—again wanting in A.

20.¹ The name Francisco occurs in D and B, but not in A. In A the soldiers on guard are not called by name; in B they are called Barnardo and Francisco; in D as in A they have no names, but the officer who enters later on is called Francisco, while in A and B his name is Marcellus.

7. In D, II, 7, Hamlet says to the actors: “Ich bin ein grosser Liebhaber eurer Exercitien und meine es nicht übel, denn man kann in einem Spiegel seine Flecken sehen.” This passage is evidently a distortion of Hamlet’s words at the corresponding place in B, III, 2, 23: “Playing, whose end both at the first, and now, was and is, to hold as twere the Mirrour up to nature, to shew vertue her feature,” etc. In A the comparison of the mirror is entirely wanting. Tanger is uncertain whether he should count this point of agreement among the class from which the element of chance is eliminated, but surely there would be no doubt in the mind of anyone else.

Besides these three, or rather four, instances, whose coincidence, as Tanger himself admits, cannot possibly be due to chance, I shall set down a few more, the agreement of which cannot be accidental, as all except Tanger will doubtless admit.

4. When the king hears of Laertes’s journey, he asks Corambus in D: “Ist es mit Eurem *Consens* geschehen?” whereupon Corambus answers with a few puns on “Consens.” In B, I, 2, 58, Polonius answers:

[He] Hath my Lord wroung from me my slowe leaue
By laboursome petition, and at last
Vpon his will I seald my hard *consent*,
I doe beseech you give him leaue to go.

¹ Cf. *Berichte*, p. 36.

In A 162 Corambis answers:

He hath, my lord, wrung from me a forced graunt
And I beseech you grant your Highnesse leaue.

Tanger thinks it is mere accident that *Consens* in D and *consent* in B are in corresponding places, and refers to the fact that elsewhere in D the tendency to use foreign words is manifest—a tendency widespread in Germany at the beginning of the eighteenth century. But why was this particular word used in this particular place? Why is it exactly the same foreign word as in the English text, and not one of the numerous others that might have suited the context equally well, as for example *Permiss*, *Sanction*, *Concession*, *Approbation*? Chance? Believe it who will.

13. In D, IV, 5, the king says to Leonhardus (Laertes) that it is hard to get justice on Hamlet because his mother “backs” him and the common people love him dearly. In the corresponding place of B, IV, 7, 11, he tells Laertes that he has spared Hamlet for two reasons:

The Queene his mother
Liues almost by his lookes, etc.
... the other motiue
Why to a publique count I might not goe,
Is the great loue the generall gender beare him.

All this is wanting in A. In order to remove the supposition that there is any connection between B and D at this place, Tanger refers to the great court scene in A where, though in an entirely different connection, Hamlet is designated by the King at the beginning of the tragedy, as “the Ioy and halfe heart of your mother” and as “Denmarkes hope.” In this way Tanger thinks he has demonstrated the possibility of an accidental agreement. Refutation of this argument seems superfluous.

17. In D, V, 6, before the fencing scene begins, Hamlet makes apologies for his deficient practice in the art of fencing. Leonhardus replies: “Ich bin Ihro Durchlaucht Diener, Sie scherzen nur.” Similarly he answers in B, V, 2, 268: “You mock me, Sir.” These words are wanting in A. Here too Tanger says the coincidence is nothing but a matter of chance. The only proof

that he can cite is that in A also Hamlet speaks of his lack of skill in fencing and that “Sie scherzen nur” and “you mock me” do not mean exactly the same thing. Again it suffices to repeat his argumentation, without entering upon any refutation.

19. In D and B Hamlet expresses the wish before dying that Fortinbras (in D Fortempras) may succeed him; in A no such wish is mentioned. Tanger points out that the manner in which Fortinbras is declared successor in D is entirely different from that in B. But this fact no one denies; it is, moreover, easily accounted for in D, which has been considerably remodeled. Tanger cannot prove, then, that this agreement of D and B as against A is a matter of chance.

Besides these eight indubitable cases I shall quote a few more that show agreement between D and B. Though the element of chance may not be absolutely eliminated from them, yet it is in my opinion highly improbable that the agreement is accidental.

1. In B, I, 1, 8, Francisco says:

—tis bitter cold
And I am sick at hart.

In D, I, 1, 11, the first sentinel says:

Ob es gleich kalt ist, so hab ich doch hier einen Höllenschweiss ausgehalten.

In A no mention is made of the cold in the first nor in the later terrace scene, though in the latter place Hamlet comments on the sharp wind.

2. In D, I, 5, the ghost begins his disclosures with these words:

Höre mich, Hamlet, denn die Zeit kommt bald, dass ich mich wieder an denselben Ort begeben muss, wo ich hergekommen.

Similarly the ghost says in B, I, 5, 2:

My houre is almost come
When I to sulphrus and tormenting flames
Must render vp myselfe.

These lines are wanting in A. Again Tanger supposes that it is accidental. He says:

Is it conceivable that the author of D would have neglected the

appeal to popular belief contained in the words "to sulphurous and tormenting flames" ?

The omission of this phrase is sufficiently explained by the decidedly North German Protestant tone of D elsewhere evident, which would not have tolerated for a moment such a concession to the Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

6. In D, II, 6, and B, II, 2, 623, Hamlet expresses in a monologue the wish that the actors might perform something similar to the murder of his father. This does not appear in A.

9. After the abrupt termination of the inserted drama Hamlet says to Horatio in D, II, 8:

Sahet ihr, wie der König sich entfärbte, als er das Spiel sahe?
Horatio: Ja, Ihro Durchlaucht, die That ist gewiss. Hamlet: [Er hat] Eben also meinen Vater getödtet, wie ihr in diesem Schauspiel gesehn.
In B, III, 2, 298, Hamlet says:

Did'st perceiue? Horatio: Very well my Lord. Hamlet: Vpon the talke of the poysning. Horatio: I did very well note him.

All this is wanting in A.

14. In D, V, 2, and B, V, 2, Hamlet tells Horatio how he escaped the attempts on his life during his journey to England; in A this is told less emphatically in the conversation between Horatio and the Queen. In D and B Hamlet indicates during his talk with Horatio that he owes his escape to God.

Of all these cases let us first discuss the three or four from which Tanger himself eliminates the possibility of chance, and in which he wants to explain the agreement by saying that certain peculiarities of B were subsequently inserted into the text based on A. In regard to No. 11 (Ophelia: "Sieh' da, mein Küttschen!") and No. 7 (the comparison of the mirror, about which Tanger is uncertain) one cannot, of course, exclude altogether the possibility, when these passages are taken from their context, that they were inserted from some other version by the actors for the sake of effect. In regard to No. 3 (the speech of the King in which he recalls the death of the brother and his own marriage, and announces the close of the time of mourning) Tanger thinks that here A had a gap "which, in case of a performance of this text, had to be filled inevitably." This view is altogether erro-

neous. The thought in D is perfectly intelligible without the words which Tanger supposes had to be inserted, especially as the two terrace scenes of D were played consecutively before the great court scene. Thus the audience knew all the facts from the speeches of Hamlet and the ghost. Moreover, mention had already been made of the noisy festivities that the King was arranging. Tanger tries to explain No. 20 (Francisco) in a still easier way. After he has attempted to show that the other points of agreement are later interpolations, he merely says: “The case may be similar in regard to the name Francisco, which occurs in D and B, but not in A.” This is going a little too far, for precisely in the case under discussion a subsequent insertion for the sake of a better understanding of the text or for theatrical effect is absolutely out of the question.

If it is found, then, that of the three or four points of agreement recognized by Tanger two cannot be explained except by supposing that parts of B were contained in the copy of D, the number of cases must be increased; for the four other points of agreement will convince everyone except Tanger that they cannot be due to chance. A subsequent insertion by the actors is especially inconceivable as regards 13, 17, and 19.

Tanger’s idea in arguing so peculiarly is evident. His theory that D is substantially based on A he tries to corroborate by saying that “D has exceedingly few points which go back to B.” But this is really the reverse of the actual facts. We shall see presently that the undisputed points of agreement between D and A are not half so numerous as those between D and B.

We have already noted that agreement between D and A does not necessarily prove D dependent on A, but that the common source Y sufficiently explains all coincidences. Dependence of D upon A could be proved only by showing that D contains traits due to the bookseller’s assistant who prepared A for the press: misunderstandings of what was spoken on the stage or arbitrary changes and additions. Such modifications could have gotten into D, not from Y of course, but only from A. Now, Tanger really believes that he has found something in D and A which could not have been derived from Y, but must be due to

the fact that the writer of A misunderstood. In this way Tanger wants to explain the most striking and characteristic coincidence of D and A: Corambis and Corambus. He has hit upon the amusing idea that the writer of A, hearing the name Polonius repeatedly on the stage, mistook it for Corambis, and thus this name got into the first printed edition. It can be readily understood that this assertion, made before the members of the English Shakespeare Society, caused considerable hilarity. There can be no doubt whatever that the agreement between D and A is traceable to Y. The form in D (Corambus) is correct and agrees, we may assume, with that in Y, for the name Corambus occurs also in Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*, IV, 3. And that Corambus was changed to Corambis in A owing to a mistake in hearing needs no explanation. But why the name Corambus should occur instead of Polonius, whether there was any covert allusion in the latter name and the actors on that account were afraid to utter it aloud from the stage—this of course we cannot determine now.

One remarkable point of agreement between A and D, occurring in the scene which takes place in the Queen's bed-chamber, may indeed throw a new light on the stage representation of *Hamlet* in Shakespeare's time. In B, III, 4, 18, Hamlet says to his mother:

Come, come and sit you downe, you shall not boudge,
 You goe not till I set you vp a glass
 Where you may see the [in]most part of you.

Ger.:

What wilt thou doe, thou wilt not murther me,
 Helpe how.

Polonius:

What how helpe!

Hamlet bids his mother sit down quietly and listen to him; should such a request make his mother suspect that he intends to kill her? The words of the poet certainly do not make the thought sufficiently clear. As a rule, it is left to the actor to supplement what is lacking by tone and gesture. Tieck demanded that a stage direction be inserted after Hamlet's words, to the

effect that Hamlet lock the door and thus arouse mortal terror in the Queen. In D the corresponding lines are:

Hamlet: Pfui! Schämet Euch. Ihr habt fast auf einen Tag Begräbniss und Beylager gehalten. *Aber still, sind alle Thüren vest verschlossen?* Königin: Warum fraget Ihr das. (Corambus hustet hinter der Tapete.)

Here, to be sure, the thought is distorted, but we are justified in assuming that the words in italics have come from an old stage direction. This supposition is made certainty I think when we compare the corresponding passage in A:

Hamlet:

Mother, mother, O are you here?

How is't with you mother?

Queene:

How is't with you?

Hamlet:

I'll tell you, *but first wee'll make all safe.*

Queene:

Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

Hamlet:

Mother, you haue my father much offended.

Queene:

How now boy?

Hamlet:

How now mother! come here, sit downe, for you shall heare me speake.

Queene:

What wilt thou doe? thou wilt not murder me;

Helpe hoe.

When Tanger points to the connection between the italicized words in A and D he is entirely right, but he is wide of the mark in supposing the passage in D occasioned by that in A. Here again the coincidence is traceable to Y. The writer, obliged to work hastily, involuntarily put into words Hamlet's significant movements in this rapidly progressing scene.

But I shall not discuss further the points of agreement between D and A, as I have dealt with them at length in former publications. I only wish to emphasize again that these coincidences are not nearly so numerous as those between D and B; if we consider

only those points of agreement from which the possibility of chance is eliminated, we find that there are eight coinciding with B and three with A, not counting the two mentioned above which I have cited in the *Berichte*, pp. 14 and 32, under No. 10.

The results of my investigations may be summarized as follows: There can be no doubt that (1) D is traceable to a stock-piece of English players traveling in Germany; that (2) the performances of such companies were very often based on stage manuscripts; that (3) in D characteristics of A and B are found that occur in no printed edition; that (4) the Shakespearean troupe must have played a version of *Hamlet* in which again the characteristics of A and B were combined. Therefore the supposition that D is based on the stage text of the Shakespearean troupe is well founded. This conjecture becomes a certainty after a careful comparison of the parts of D which agree with those of A and B.

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